

## the skyline in my veins by lilibug

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**Summary:**

It rains on November 7th, like it's always supposed to.

El watches the sky form clouds of grey, crystal clear droplets that wash away the leftover dust from the corn harvest. It's a special day, though — today. One she'll remember just as clearly as the day she first met Mike in the pouring rain, frozen to the bone. It's the beginning of the rest of their lives. Together.

## the skyline in my veins

### Author's Note:

Hello! This is just a smidge late, but I did it! I wrote something for mileven week! I hope you all like it.

[@eleven-n-mike](#) thank you for the [post](#) that inspired it to begin with!

[@stark](#) beta'd this for me, my ever loyal wife.

also! a playlist (not necessarily best reading music, but what I listened to while writing that gave me good 80s or mileven vibes): animal kingdom - chaos emeralds / eighteen - dive in / everything's a dream - rosa / arrow - levv / lovers - anna of the north

On November 7th she wakes to find it raining in sheets, sky bleak and grey.

There are droplets on the windowsill of the old log cabin, cracked and peeling paint that was once supposed to be a shade of white. El runs her finger through them, catching the water and remembering all the times when particularly hard torrent would come pouring in. A fond smile graced her lips, eyes finding the line of trees that circles the house.

The branches sway, dancing in the swirling wind and she remembers how they felt against her skin so many years ago. Feet bare in the soil, turning to soupy mud beneath her toes as she ran fast and hard. Her lungs burning with the breath of cold air, wet leaves and branches slapping her arms, bushes scratching against her legs in the brush of the forest.

There's knocking on her bedroom door that pulls her from the memory just as quickly as it sucked her in.

The simple, comforting raps against the wood (*two one three*), have her pulling back from the where she'd been pressing her forehead

against the cool glass pane.

“Yes?” El clears her throat, touching the base of her neck before tucking hair behind her ear. It’s frizzy under her finger tips and her eyes roll back to the window before the door opens with a squeak of it’s tired hinges.

Hopper inches through frame, leaning against the knob. “Raining pretty hard out there.” He takes a sip from his mug, but it doesn’t hide his frown or the crease between his brows.

It’s rained more than not in the past week, today is no different than any other.

Except that it is.

“It’s still early,” she offers with a shrug of her shoulder.

He doesn’t say anything right away, just looks around her room before landing on the small vanity where only a couple products are spread across the surface. “You doin’ that yourself?”

With a nod, she folds herself into the small chair and stares at her reflection. It’s changed since the last time she looked through this mirror, smudged with time and age, and another life lived well before hers.

“Joyce is coming to help with my hair.”

His head bobs up and down, lips smacking together after taking a gulp of his coffee. “Of course. She might have mentioned that.” He runs his hand through the wisps of hair that seem to grow more sparse every year and then he smiles that wide, crinkly smile of his. “Think she’ll do mine?”

It nearly cracks her face in two, laughter bubbling in her chest that feels so welcome. “Maybe if you ask nicely,” she teases.

He walks further into the room, just to ruffle her hair.

She paws at his arm, shoving his heavy palm from her head — he gives her another pat. “I’m not so far removed from knowing what

it's like. To have no hair."

His eyebrows lift. "You call ten years not long ago?"

El looks up at him through the mirror before picking up the pale pink brush in front of her. "It feels like yesterday." Her fingers pluck at the bristles before she draws it through the length of her hair, scalp to sternum.

The time has seemed to pass in a whirlwind when she looks back at it, though in the moment it felt endless. She supposes it will always be like that, or so she hopes. Today is a day that will pass just as quickly.

He watches her brush the barely there waves indented in her hair. "It certainly feels like a lifetime to me. I've gotten enough grey hair to prove it."

Her eyes roll, shoo-ing him with her hand. "Enough of you, old man. Let me get ready in peace. I have to make myself presentable."

"You're perfect just like this, Ellie bear."

Her heart sings with familiarity, longing for the nickname that was always *just hers*. "Well, thanks for the vote of confidence, Dad, but — I have to do *something*."

"I reckon Mike would agree with me, you know."

"Well, I *reckon* Mike would say that even if I was covered in... in boils or something." Her nose scrunches up and she shakes her head. "Minimal at best, something all the same."

"Well, just be mindful of the rain. I'm not sure it's going to stop."

There is a long pause as she opens the containers of eyeshadow, pumps the tube of mascara.

"You sure this isn't going to upset things?"

The question is double sided.

She thinks about the chairs they lined up in front of the weeping willow, just off the big curve on Mirkwood. And of the trunk of the tree that so long ago Mike had sloppily carved their initials into with the knife he'd taken from Jonathan's desk. Of the caterer that Karen and Ted splurged on. Of the whispered words of promise that left both their lips that they would echo today. Of their friends.

She shakes her head. "It'll be perfect."

He doesn't look as confident as her, wary as he turns toward the window. "If you say so. I'll leave you to it. Joyce is comin' down shortly. Said she'd be here by noon."

"With the dress?"

He nods. "With the dress."

"Perfect."

Her smile is infectious and he returns it back to her before pulling the door shut on the way out.

Focusing on the mirror, she applies her makeup in light strokes. In hindsight, she doesn't really expect it to last all day.

Rubbing under her nose unconsciously, she hears the plunk of the objects in the room settling back into place. Closing her eyes, the blackness fills the cracks and pores where her anxiety bleeds. Taking a breath, she opens her eyes and tosses her hair over her shoulders then takes her time with the brushes that still feel foreign in her hand. The sound of the rain calming the itch in her fingers and the buzz of her skin.

When the door opens sometime later, it's a wonder she has finished anything at all. Mind so far away when all she wants to be with—

"El, sweetie?"

Joyce is hesitantly coming through the door, arms full with a garment bag and a case of hair rollers. Her own face done up in exactly the way El has always admired. Simple and elegant, a rare thing, but always a joy.

She giggles to herself, lips curving into a smile as she stands to welcome Joyce with a sideways hug. “You look really pretty.” Her finger twists around a curl hanging over the woman’s shoulder, before accepting the bag with the dress zipped inside. Fingers curling around the blue and white gingham seersucker, she turns to lay it across the single bed tucked into the corner of the room.

“Thank you, but you’re the pretty little thing today,” Joyce says somewhat bashfully, waving her off and setting the case of curlers onto the vanity. “Now, let’s get your hair set up.”

El abandons the dress with a forlorn look and slides back into the chair that creaks in mild protest.

“Are you ready for today?”

She watches Joyce unzip the clear plastic, removing a variety of rollers, clips, and a hair dryer. Her nails tap against her leg, smooth where she’d scrubbed and shaved that morning in the bath.

“Yes.”

A comforting smile reflects back at her, and it calms the fluttering storm of butterflies that she had seemingly swallowed.

“I think it’ll be really great. I just hope everyone brings their umbrellas.”

“They might need a boat, too.”

Joyce squeezes her shoulder before running a couple fingers through El’s hair as she sprays some water to wet the strands. “So do you want it all pulled back? All the curl will fall out anyway, but it might hold better.”

“Oh, well — I’d really like it mostly down. I don’t care about the rain.”

“You’re sure? Are you going to hold an umbrella?”

“I don’t think so.”

There a soft frown on Joyce's face that she wants nothing more than to erase.

"I'll be fine. I promise. Just maybe — some strands from the front pulled back into a braided bun? Then the rest curled?" She pleads, chewing on her lip and already smearing the sticky gloss spread over them.

"Well — alright. If you're really sure?"

"Yes."

"Alright, let's get to work then." She smiles again, looking down at El as she begins again on her hair.

They roll her damp hair into the neon-orange curlers and it reminds her of all the times that they did this for school dances, year after year. Each one the test for something new that Mike would always be wowed by, as if he wouldn't be if she just wore it like every other day.

The thought has her squeezing her eyes shut, wondering what Mike was doing. If he was being nagged by Karen about taking a thousand pictures before anything even began or busy tying the bow tie she'd sewn by hand or the more probable situation — Ted tying the bowtie and Mike whining about it.

The hot blast of air from the hair dryer as it waved back and forth over her head has her opening her eyes, Joyce's soft humming of a familiar tune barely hitting her ears. But she recognizes the notes, heart clenching at the sound and filling with warmth that spreads out to her toes.

They'll dance to it later, her and Mike. She looks forward to twirling around in the school gymnasium one more time with their song playing overhead. It might be a little cheesy, but they were nothing if not romantic. Their friends certainly had a slew of names for it — though in jest. Mostly.

When her hair is dry and finger combed through, Joyce picks apart the strands to braid a few backwards for a dainty bun secured with

bobby pins that shimmer at the ends. It looks elegant without being too formal which is exactly what she wanted.

El touches the base of her throat, where the little silver key rests just below her fingers and she runs her nail across the chain. “Thank you,” she says softly, too quiet. Turning to look up at her step mother, she reaches out to grab her ever busy hands — the nervous shake never quite hidden. “Thank you, Joyce. For this — the dress — for everything.”

“Oh, sweetheart,” she coos, lips pursing together before she shakes her head. “It’s my pleasure. When I was younger I always wanted a daughter — and I got the best one.”

El all but leaps from the chair, curling her arms around Joyce’s waist in a hug as she slots her chin into the crook of her neck. There are a million words stuck in her throat, not quite sure what else to say or how to say it. It’s something she still struggles with, to articulate the mess of feelings that fills her veins with each shade of the rainbow. So she breathes in. The scent of Rave clinging to Joyce’s curls making her a little dizzy as she squeezes her arms just a little tighter. “I love you.”

Joyce rubs across her back, soothingly, and it does wonders in getting her to relax. “I know. I know you do, and I love you, too. Your dad and I are so proud of you. You know that?” She pulls back to tilt El’s chin up and pat her cheek. “You and Mike are going to do great in Chicago.”

“Thanks,” she says, trying not to let her voice crack, arms folding around her middle while shuffling over to the bed. It’s a wonder she won’t have to redo her makeup, but she supposes that rivers run dry and so tear ducts.

“I’m going to go see if your dad needs any help.”

The sound of tip-taps against the hardwood as Joyce exits, and closes the door has her chewing on her lip. The strawberry lip gloss hits her tongue, but she doesn’t stop.

It’s always been scary. The future.



She spent her life, even this day, wondering if today was going to be the day that *something* or *someone* was going to come for her. To take everything away. To take her away.

Then, there was the matter of careers and normal lives, and growing older by the second. Long, tortuous years of school finished and jobs to be started. In different states and some, far far away from everything they've ever known.

El keeps those difficult thoughts in the back of her head, turning them over and over like a roasting marshmallow, clinging to ash that threatens to fall. She can smell the flame and fire, the salt and blood, and swipes her fingers under her nose as her mind suddenly begins to ache and scream as her limbs feel prickly and numb.

She freezes for a moment, listening to the rain and her parents in the next room fussing over each other. There is nothing else. No click of a gun, roll of big black tires, or unfamiliar footsteps.

Her stomach leaps to her throat, hair raising along her arms and neck as she dives for the bottom drawer of the nightstand. She yanks it open and finds the supercom resting atop a stack of notebooks, right where she left it.

Fumbling with the knobs, she clicks it on with hope that there is still some life left in it.

Immediately, there is a broken, crackly, "El?" that filters through and does little to settle her.

"Mike? Mike, is everything okay?"

She waits for a moment, sinking down to the floor and sitting with her back against the bed. There is a trepidation in her fingers as the com waves flutter.

"Yeah."

Is his reply and she wants to believe it, but needs more than that. Always more than that.

"Everything's fine, I just wanted to hear your voice."

Her eyes slip closed and she shakes her head. "I was scared, Mike. I got this really weird feeling."

He audibly sighs and she can practically see him running a hand through his unruly hair.

She could close her eyes, concentrate, and take a peek if she really wanted. But there was a reason they were apart the last day.

"Sorry. I've been trying to get you on the comm for, like, 30 minutes. Forgot to tell you to turn it on yesterday morning."

There's a quietness for a moment as she lets herself calm back down. Because everything is okay. Mike is okay.

"Why didn't you just... call? On the phone?" She raps her nails against her knee, fingers circling the bruise on the inside.

"Well, yeah, I guess I *could* have. But... this was cooler."

El rolls her eyes, leaning her head back against the bed. "*Mike.*"

"Hey! It's like old times, you know? When we would talk all night and then my mom would throw a fit when I kept asking for more batteries."

She can imagine Karen's face exactly, with that little scrunch between her eyebrows that she's always trying to fix with creams and serums.

"She totally knew you weren't sleeping at night."

"Trust me, that's the better version," he pauses for a moment. "Do you think that she knows I started sneaking out and going over to your house instead?"

Something inside her twists in excitement, at the memory of the thrill of turning the lock with a tilt of her head and sneaking his tall frame through her small window. She's smiling. "I really hope not. But she never said anything or tried to stop you. So who knows."

There's a quietness that crackles over the static in the channel.

“I love you,” Mike says softly, like he’s whispering into the com. “I missed you last night. Couldn’t sleep.”

Her head drops back against the single mattress behind her and she nods in agreement. “Me either. I didn’t think it would be so hard.”

“Yeah, I didn’t really think I’d miss your snoring, but I did.”

El picks her head up, glaring down at the com in her hands, hoping that he can feel it through the distance between them. She pressed down on the trigger harder than necessary. “I do *not* snore.”

His laughter is a throaty chuckle and it sends shivers down her spine. She aches to run her hands through the curls in his hair, softer than her own, and play connect the dots within the freckles that cover his skin. She crosses her ankles over one another, picking at the hem of her shorts. The clock on her nightstand ticks down to the next hour — to when they’ll see each other again.

“Just kidding. Maybe.”

She bristles, wondering if she really does snore.

“So... are you ready?” he asks when she doesn’t say anything else.

Turning in her spot, she runs her nail across the fabric bows of the garment bag, old and time-faded. “Not all the way.”

“What are you wearing right now?”

She imagines the way his cheeks are probably dusted with pink, realizing just how that sounds and she holds in her laughter.

“Pajamas.”

“It’s almost time, you know.”

“Yes.” Her fingers tugging on the zipper of the bag until it reveals the cream lace hidden within. It’s soft under her touch. She hears rustling through the com, hears his soft breath and wonders if he’s just laid down on the bed. “Joyce’s dress is going to get wet.”

“*Your* dress is going to get wet.”

It’s a gift, one that her real mother wasn’t able to pass to her, but one that Joyce was more than happy to.

She slides the dress from the bag and spreads it across the bed. “It’s really pretty, Mike. Too pretty.”

“Nothing’s too pretty for you,” he says without a beat. “Don’t worry about the rain.”

El hums, hanging up the bag on the back of the door and then turning the dress over to reveal the back and the fabric buttons hidden in the lace. She picks up the com beside the dress, turns her back to it and looks back out the window. “I’m not worried. It’s good luck, you know? To be married in the rain.”

He seems surprised. “Really? Are you sure it’s not some terrible superstition that we’re doomed to be down on our luck for eternity and we have to live, like, with our parents or who knows — maybe with Jonathan, Nancy, and Steve, oh god *that* would be terrible — and we’re forced to endure some—”

“Mike.”

“—weird body horror nightmares or something straight out of a conspiracy theory—”

She thinks for moment, that they have already done that. Thrice, in fact.

“*Mike.*”

His ramblings quiet on the other end and she *feels* him close his eyes and breathe, as if he were right next to her.

“It’s almost exactly like the day we met.” She offers, the most prominent part of today — of their future — no matter what it held, would be exactly how they started.

Of course, she’s a little bit scared about everything changing so vastly, from their location to when and how often they would get to

see their friends. But, there's part of her that's excited for new opportunities and experiences as well. And she's excited that she gets to navigate these fresh waters with Mike. They have a lot of firsts together and more is always appealing.

"Well, not *exactly* the same. Hopefully. Because, I'm not sure I can go through Will disappearing again." The line quiets and then he sounds a little bit faraway, "Will? ....Will!"

Her nose scrunches up in laughter, hearing the muffled voice of their friend, her step-brother, in the background. "Found him?"

"Yeah. Gotta keep an eye on that one, for sure. Whew. Crisis avoided." She can hear his grin.

The clock edges closer to 4pm, ticking down the seconds until they're together again. She's nervous, despite the calmness that the rain washes her in.

"So..."

"So," he echoes.

El fidgets with buttons on the dress, popping them open one by one down the back. "I have to get dressed."

"By all means, go ahead."

She clicks her tongue against the roof of her mouth and sets the com down on the bed, but not before asking, cheekily, "What are you wearing, over there?" and then chucks her sleep shorts and t-shirt atop her overnight bag.

There's a lacy set of antique lace undergarments that she might have spent a sizeable amount of money on under the influence of Max, that makes its way onto her person.

"Oh, I've been ready for a while. It's going to be a miracle if I don't sweat through my suit jacket. And this *bowtie* — El, I love it, I do, but — it's, like, suffocating me."

She steps into the dress and brings the lace sleeves up about her

arms. Her ankles stare up at her, and she wiggles her toes against the floorboards as she presses the com. "You'll be fine. It's only for a little while."

The row of buttons going up the back have to wait for another set of hands, but she admires the view in the mirror anyway. It's not often that she finds herself feeling particularly confident in her appearance, but today is a good day.

Mike loves her always, but he will really love this.

He has a thing for texture and the dress has a multitude. Silk, or maybe chiffon, with lace overtop that encompasses her shoulders and makes up the train. Then there's velvet that cinches the dress in an empire waist, with pearls sewn into band.

She almost groans at the amount of PDA that will surely arise, but screw everyone else; it's their day.

"I'll see you soon," she whispers into the com.

"Promise?"

"Yes. I promise."

"O-kay. I love you, over and out." He sounds like his knee is bouncing up and down a mile a minute.

"I love you, too, Mike. Over and out."

She flips the switch on the com and places it back in the drawer, sliding it closed to rest for however long until the next time they needed them. It was few and far between now.

Stepping into the low heels, it elevates her frame a couple of inches and she trots over to the doorway after pulling her necklace out to lay overtop the dress.

When she opens the door, the stillness of a hurried conversation dying has her skin buzzing. "Dad? Could you button me up?"

The next five minutes pull more emotion from Hopper than she's seen

in a while. The look on his face as he tries not to cry have her tear ducts suddenly working overtime. Who ever said that weddings were happy? It seemed like people cried more than anything.

He hugs her for a long time, her head tucked into his chest and the smell of a rented tux along with the smell of smoke have her sighing.

“Come on, kid, let’s get you hitched. It’s about damn time.” He almost ruffles her hair until Joyce smacks him on the arm.

Despite the rain, the clouds have brightened and there are bits of sunshine peeking through. They pile out onto the porch, hurrying to the cars between the raindrops.

The old blazer looks past its prime next to Joyce’s new bonnevillie, shiny and new. She looks right at home as she pulls onto the road.

El slides into the front seat of the cruiser, clips the seat belt buckle across her lap and turns her head to the side as Hopper turns the ignition.

It isn’t a very far drive, but she admires it through the droplet covered window; scenery unfolding in breathtaking beauty through the steady drizzle. Splashes of marigold and dots of tangerine within the fading greens, wine splashed across the skyline as the sun begins to dip far sooner than she ever likes.

Then the car is stopping and her heart rate speeds up.

“Ready?” Hopper raises his eyebrows.

“Definitely.” She slides her feet from her heels, and pulls the door handle to step out into the wet grass with bare toes.

There’s a small incline to hike up and she lifts the hem of her dress, hoping that she isn’t soiling it beyond the point of a dry cleaning. But as she digs her toes into the ground, chilly and wet, she lets the fabric fall down and hooks an arm around Hopper’s elbow.

With a bouquet of aster and chrysanthemums, El walks toward Mike.

He’s already crying. Rubbing the back of his hand under his eye as

their friends flank either side of the tree, waiting for her.

A droplet of rain (or is that a tear?) slides down to the tip of her nose as she smiles.

Hopper kisses her forehead sweetly and places her hand in Mike's slightly damp palm.

She squeezes him. "Hi."

His shoulders relax the second she touched him, slumping forward to hide his height and then he's sloping down to kiss her cheek, ignoring a huff from the minister.

"Hi, yourself. You look... really, *really* beautiful."

El beams then makes a little humming sound under her breath. "Look who's talking." She has the urge to reach up and tweak his bowtie sitting crooked at his neck, but let's it slide. The dinosaur print seems to wink at her, though it makes her fingers ache in painstaking remembrance.

They can't quite stop staring at each other, which isn't so different than normal. But today feels just like the first day they met, goosebumps rising along her skin as she blinks through the raindrops and stares up at him.

The view might have changed a bit, but it feels familiar and *right*. Their love for each other is interlaced between every moment and it steals her breath to think of beginning her new life with Mike in the rain, just like all those years ago.

*fin*

### **Author's Note:**

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bughead and mileven. [@jane-hoppers](#)